

# Standing up against domestic violence

## Over 100 marchers call for law to address the issue

Bonny Mascarenhas

Over one hundred people displayed their solidarity yesterday demanding a law to address domestic violence near the Al Fateh Mosque in Juffair, yesterday.

The event was organised by the Bahrain Women's Union and the participants marched from the mosque up to Marina Club along the road near the Marina beach.

"We were pleased with the response we received to the event," Sabah Seyadi, an organiser of the event told the *Bahrain Tribune*.

At the end of the march, a petition was signed requesting and highlighting the need for a law to address their demand, she added. The petition will be presented to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, requesting him to look in the matter.

"We are also going to lobby politicians and decision-makers and highlight the issue with them, Seyadi said.

A meeting will be held today with Members of Parliament during which the women will call for the creation of the law and put forward to the deputies their suggestions on the areas it should address in the issue of Domestic violence.

Seventy-two Bahraini women have



BIJU HARIDAS

**A STRONG PUSH:** A rally was held yesterday near the Al fatah Mosque demanding a law to protect women from Domestic violence.

reported being abused by their husbands in the past 12 months according to figures released by the Bahrain Women's Union.

They said they have suffered physical violence, emotional abuse and financial neglect.

Recently, Bahrain launched an innovative petition, the first in the region, with men pledging to fight domestic violence.

The petition is backed by UN agen-

cies in Bahrain, which will coordinate with their counterparts in the Gulf.

The petition was first signed by Shaikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, president of the General Organisation for Youth and Sports, followed by government heads and activists.

Women activists and NGOs backed the initiative, which, they said, would be a step forward to tackling the problem.

A group of activists have proposed that Bahraini deputies draft a law that criminalises domestic violence. The proposal aims at eliminating discrimination against women, ensuring gender equality and providing social security for women.

But the situation on the ground is different, as often victims feel scared to report abuses fearing public ridicule, activists say.

Fouzia Rabea, head of the Bahrain chapter of Amnesty International, said: "We receive calls from women who are being physically assaulted by their husbands. In most cases, the husband is alcoholic, unemployed or a drug addict. The victims are afraid to report and this attitude needs to change."

Several families consider talking about domestic violence as a sensitive issue and prefer not to file official complaints against the abusers.

Local activists have in the past urged the government to enact a law to protect wives from being victimised by their husbands. Bahraini courts do not grant women divorce unless their husbands physically abuse them. So if couples live separately, the court has no reason to order a divorce.

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